

The CEA CRITIC

Formerly THE NEWS LETTER of the College English Association

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January, 1949

Model and Example

This issue of the CRITIC establishes no precedent, but the New England meeting which it reports is a model and example of what the Association was founded to do. By beginning on page one and reading through this issue, members will appreciate the rich program as it was enjoyed by those at the meeting. And those who were present will find a nearly complete record of what they heard. The luncheon addresses of Elizabeth Manwaring and Robert M. Guy will appear together later in tribute to them as founders and early workers in establishing the Association. C. L. Barber's "Ulysses for Undergraduates" is in type, but will appear later because of space limitations. Ex-President Odell Shepard's paper "Emerson Unlearns How To Write", and Daniel Aaron's paper "William Dean Howells And The Middle-Class Conscience" were both chapters in forthcoming books, to which members are most enthusiastically referred.

All members will join in an expression of gratitude to those who planned this meeting—the officers of the New England Group and the Program Committee, to those who appeared on the program, and to the following people of good will who helped: Prof. Carroll Towle, Univ. of N. H.; Prof. Esther Dunn, Smith; Prof. Randall Stewart, Brown; Prof. Raymond Bosworth, Simmons; Dean Frank Prentice Rand, Prof. Charles DuBois, News Editor Robert McCartney, Publications Director Arthur Musgrave, and Mrs. Juliet Ellis and her assistants, all of the Univ. of Mass.; Director William Pinkerton, Harvard Press Bureau; Dr. William Marnell, Boston Latin School; Mr. Eugene Geringer and the management of the Harvard Faculty Club; and Mrs. Maxwell Goldberg, Mrs. Leone Barron, and Miss Virginia M. Butler. President Spencer was in a very special sense the host, for the group met at his personal invitation.

THEODORE SPENCER

Theodore Spencer died suddenly of a heart attack on January 18, 1949. As Director, and then as President, he had always been ready and warm in his support of the Association and its purposes. The loss of that support will be severe, and it is perhaps the simplest and surest tribute to Mr. Spencer that his loss will be felt so widely. At Princeton and Cambridge, and at Harvard where he was Boylston Professor; at the Boston Athenaeum and the New England Conservatory of Music and Wellesley College, to all of which he acted as Trustee; and throughout the world of humane letters, Theodore Spencer had made himself felt as an advocate and example of what is finest in scholarship, in criticism, and in the literature of his day.

It is most appropriate that the January CRITIC should be a full report of the New England meeting which Mr. Spencer had done so much to make a success. His Presidential Address, given in New York, will appear in February.

The following officers of the New England group were elected for 1949: President, Walter Simmons, R. I. State; Vice Presidents, Maxwell H. Goldberg, Univ. of Mass., and Morse Allen, Trinity; Secretary-Treasurer, Howard Bartlett, M.I.T.; Directors, G. Harris Daggett, Univ. of N. H., and John Holmes, Tufts.

Annual Meeting—California

The Constitution of the Association provides that the Annual Meeting be held in conjunction with that of the Modern Language Association. M. L. A. will meet at Stanford University, California, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, September 7, 8, 9, 1949. Plans for the Annual Meeting of our Association will be announced soon.

The Kenyon School of English will hold its second session in 1949, June 23 to August 6. Bulletin now available. Address Charles M. Coffin, Dean, Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio.

NEW ENGLAND MEETING

Ad astra per aspera

About two hundred representatives of sixty-one institutions came to the New England C.E.A. meeting at Harvard University on November 27. All the New England states were well represented, and some of the strong delegations came from colleges at considerable distance—for example, Bates, Colby, and Westbrook Junior College. Others with strong representation were Harvard, Wellesley, Boston Univ., Univ. of Massachusetts, Mt. Holyoke, Northeastern, Univ. of Connecticut, Suffolk, Lasell Junior College, Rhode Island State, Trinity, and Tufts.

In the opening session, at which President Simmons presided, Professor Howard Mumford Jones recalled John Livingston Lowes' observation "that the best brains go into science, the next best into the humanities"; and he admitted that "the romantic fascination of science has, ever since Hiroshima, been increasing." Nevertheless, on the basis of his experiences with "a good many scientists" in the course of his duties at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the speaker reported that "few or none" of them "believe that science is the be-all and the end-all." "Most

of them," he insisted, "are eager to give the humanities a hand up." The humanities, on the other hand, he was sorry to say, "do not always put forth a hand to seize on."

All in all, Professor Jones did acknowledge that "the humanities, which once were the core of any conceivable education, are now not at that core, but on the periphery of our thinking about education"; and he ascribed this situation to a "false theory of the importance of the arts" from which "we have been suffering." That "false theory is the product of the genteel tradition, of genteel culture, of that curious point of view which assumes that the principal business of art in life is to serve as a pleasant hobby, a cultural accomplishment, a leisure-hour activity." During the past quarter of a century "Literary study has had a determination of sentimentality to the head"; and teacher and student have coquetted with each other "across a book as if they were the conscious lovers of Sir Richard Steele." A main result has been a lowering of the "intellectual water table for the whole country"; a "queer kind of faith that literary teaching is a sort of mystical shower-bath—exposure to which for fifteen minutes a day will send you forth a cleaner, finer man."

As an antidote to the notion that "writing is 'expression', that the primary business of a book is merely to release personality, that meanings of small things like dates and words are unimportant before the supposed larger meaning of the total poem", Professor Jones recommended that "we grow more rather than less particular about meanings." "It makes every difference," he stated, "whether you look upon Troilus as a bashful young man who wants to get into bed with Criseyde and doesn't dare to un-

(Continued on Page 2)

NEW ENGLAND MEETING

University of Massachusetts
Amherst, Massachusetts

Saturday, May 7, 1949

Some Key Participants: Ernest Bernbaum, Kenneth Burke, Reginald Cook, Wilbert Snow, George F. Whicher.

Other speakers and further details later.

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Impertinence?

Dear Editor:

You have achieved something. You have managed, in the December **CEA CRITIC**, to produce the least rewarding issue of any periodical I have read—and I've been reading for a long time.

The one worth-while inclusion is the sensible letter from Arthur H. Nethercot; but your silly editorial more than makes up for the favor of the letter. Eliot has been rightly and effectively criticized (e.g., by F. R. Leavis, in the **Sewanee Review**, LVII, 1, Winter, 1949). Your smug dismissal of him, however, is not criticism; and your pontification about what should be taught in publicly supported colleges is sheer impertinence.

Permit me, incidentally, to confirm Mr. Nethercot's skepticism.

T. C. Hoepfner

Alabama Polytechnic Institute

For easy reference, the impertinent pontification is quoted below. Members are requested not

to stifle that impulse to write the editor.

Literary study that is not finally and explicitly moral is dilletante, sterile, and unworthy consideration in publicly supported college education. Such education is for all students in all colleges. It is presumed to develop informed social and moral values. If it does not, on what basis may it be supported except the utilitarian? The end of literary study in the program is to reach all students on some level, and in some way to make them feel the delight and the moral values in the literature studied. To succeed is to satisfy a warm and natural interest in all students, and to fail is to follow a false logic of choice or of criticism. Success gives intelligent pleasure, increases wisdom, multiplies the public for good books, and opens for cultivation vast areas in which fuller appreciation will develop naturally. No teacher need be ashamed of the task, or feel it an unworthy challenge to his skill.

AD ASTRA

(Continued from Page One)

til Pandarus pushes him in, or whether you understand that as a chivalrous young man should, he is for two books of the poem practising *fin amor*."

Professor Jones pleaded that, instead of following "the banner of sensibility much as Tennyson's knights followed wandering fires", teachers insist upon "the intellectual dignity of literary studies." "To encourage among poorer students an emotional debauch is not teaching; it is treason," he declared. In conclusion, he stressed that "style, form, substance, are comprehensible on an intellectual plane and as forms of an intellectual order"; and, quoting the dictum *Ad astra per aspera*, he sounded the keynote for the discussions that followed.

And Gladly Teach

(Report of the program, "Creative Writers as Teachers of English," John Holmes, Tufts, Chairman.)

When a creative writer is member of a college English department, what good does it do the student, and how may that good be done? What does it do for the college, and what do the student and the college do for the writer? Finally, what does the job do for the writer?

David Morton

The first speaker, David Morton, admitted, with satisfaction,

that, as a teacher, he had "not been guilty of committing — Method, that first of the Deadly Sins, in this corrupt century of techniques. . . . Let's confess," he urged, "that the best teaching proceeds out of unregenerate opportunism; that the best teacher is a devoted and alert opportunist. . . . How should it be otherwise?" he asked. "We are dealing with the most volatile phenomenon known: the maturing adolescent."

Reviewing his own thirty-five years of teaching, he discerned at least two recurring objectives: (1) "to give the student the feeling that literature is a reality"; (2) "to energize, sensitize, and inform his intelligence." As he means to the first of these ends, he recommended teaching first the literature of our own time; for as he put it: "I know of no way of apprehending reality except by participating in it. And I confess I do not know on what terms a nineteen or twenty year old boy is going to participate in — say — Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, coming upon it in a state of innocence, with no implanted suspicion that it has some connection with the life of this world. I taught the Eighteenth Century, always; after a brief excursion in the Twentieth—after a session with Willa Cather and Thornton Wilder and Robert Frost, or William Faulkner, and Hemingway and Edwin Arlington Robinson. Here was a world the student moved through with recognition: the furniture has a look and a feel that he knows; the people, in costume and custom, are like people he has seen; and, most useful of all, the language is his own tongue. It all looks like life; and it sounds like life; and in some instances smells like life. He comes off with the suspicion that literature—a book—may, just possibly may, have some connection with what he means by 'life'. . . . Time enough, then, to move on to the *Essay on Criticism*. It will still strike him as 'strange' (all the better!) in furniture, in sound. But the suspicion is in him, that this may have some connection with life, something that he knows for reality, something familiar beneath the surface strangeness."

"That other objective—touching the intelligence in its encounter with literature," Professor Morton has "approached, also, from a point remote"; "The essence of intelligence is the capacity for making distinctions. An intelligent understanding of the distinctive product that English Literature is will ask: distinctive from what? For years I began a course in the English novel by reading Anatole France, Knute Hamsun, and Turgenev.

Perhaps the one thing they have in common is that the interests and values and disciplines are different from those of the English novel—which was the whole point of their usefulness, in the circumstances. A student, coming off from 'The Red Lily', or 'Growth of the Soil', or 'Fathers and Sons', to a reading of 'Tom Jones' and its successors felt, in his own experience, that this was a different thing—in interests and values and disciplines—a distinctive, a unique, a peculiarly English thing. . . . As in the case of the other objective, this proved a useful 'way' to the intelligent reading of the English novel."

One of these values, the second speaker—May Sarton—stressed in her remarks. No one knows better than the writer, she affirmed, the immediacy of literature; and it is this immediacy which is a main contribution, to education in literature, by the writer-teacher.

May Sarton

I think I should preface these remarks by saying that my lectures for the Association of American Colleges take me far from the brilliant Eastern seaboard, and that I was poet in residence at the State Teachers College in the middle of the mining towns of Little Egypt in Southern Illinois. To be any sort of teacher in these smaller colleges is to do battle every hour and every day against almost overwhelming forces of inertia, apathy and just plain cynicism about all the values for which you presumably stand. The students are by no means virgin ground. They have been thoroughly impregnated by *Time Magazine*, the *Reader's Digest*, the Radio; and in the South, except in Negro colleges, they are morally atrophied by having refused to face the one great moral issue which confronts them. In general their attitude toward the teaching profession can be summed up in the words I heard called across a campus to a young girl student, "Hey, I hear you're going to be an old-maid school teacher."

In these places the creative writer can be almost immeasurably valuable. Perhaps the most important thing he does is to back up the teachers of English. Over and over again professors have come to me to say "Thank you." The outsider repeating the things they themselves have been saying for years gives them an added weight, makes the students think, "Well, maybe there's something in this after all."

I might add that I have been deeply touched by the generosity and gratefulness of teachers everywhere—it's easy to come in for

a month or two and do a fair job; but they stick to it all the time and go on giving for meagre rewards.

The main point about the creative writer as teacher is, of course, that he is in the midst of the struggle himself, and the students must feel this. He is no Olympian summing up in a witty way the failings of the great poets, a common parlor game of academic teachers. He is right down in the ring himself, fighting. His value is this immediacy, this sense he makes tangible that the world of literature is here and now, and happens in the school room, that even professional writers beat their heads against the wall and give themselves a zero more than half the time.

Kay Boyle says somewhere, "Where have the days gone, where slipped away when young men duelled, drew blood, perished for a play or the motive behind it, for a word and what shaped it, for I would do battle for a play or a line of poetry."

This sense of immediacy the creative writer has. In the case of poetry it is my experience that on the whole the subject is simply not taught at all. Between the poet and his audience stands the teacher of poetry, in too many cases. It took me ten years to get over the boredom induced by Milton as taught in my high school. Most students never get over it. I do not believe that creative writers in general induce boredom as teachers. The tension is there, the sense that literature is real, much more alive than yesterday's paper, something worth hungering and thirsting after and worth fighting for. As a by-product the student may realize that it is possible to have a fruitful, adventurous life without making a great deal of money, or even being a "success".

The creative writer is able to make literature an experience; and if he is any good at the job, an unforgettable experience. At best and if he is better at it than most of us, he should revolutionize the students' thinking about values, and as far as I am concerned this is the great fight education is fighting in the United States. The teacher in the U.S. today is on the frontier. He stands and fights at one of the last outposts where there is still a chance to keep the wilderness of false values, magazine values, "success" values, money values from taking over the country. I do not think his importance can be over-emphasized.

The creative writer can come in and attack and be listened to because his life is proof of what he is talking about. Edward

Thomas said about the power of using words, "Nothing is more mysterious than this power." It is the supreme proof, above beauty, physical strength, intelligence, that a man or woman lives." In education today we are fighting a battle against zombies, and there are times when one begins to fear it a losing battle.

Some of us here are poets. I do not need to point out that to be a poet in America today is to be continually on the defensive. Poetry has no living part in our civilization—which simply means, as far as I am concerned, that ours is not a civilization. Under the huge efficient technical superstructures, the roots of the spirit are literally withering. Our children are starved by the fear of intensity, the fear of thought, the fear of experience. As Muriel Rukeyser says in a memorable poem, "The fear of poetry is the fear." Our children take refuge in comic books and crooners. I do not think *zombie* too strong a word to use.

So much for the creative writer in what he can give as teacher. What the students and teaching give to the creative writer is also immeasurable.

There is nothing more healthy for a writer than to have to formulate the things by which he lives, to get down to the anatomy of his craft. We are all lazy and it's valuable to be dragged out of our laziness and forced to think clearly and to the end. I always feel I have learned far more than I shall ever be able to teach on these occasions.

But if a creative writer is to have a permanent teaching job, it seems to me that colleges should recognize the fact that his value is just because he is doing what he talks about, and so arrange his schedule that he can keep his fire. A harassed creative writer who is wondering how in Hell he will ever have the time to write the poem that has left out of a class discussion that morning, is no good to the college. Space and time are as necessary to him as food and sleep, more necessary than a high salary. There is not much point in asking a creative writer to teach and then to deprive him of his chief value through overwork.

To sum up: the creative writer as teacher can make literature a living experience, can make great demands on the student and rouse him to fierce work, if he himself is not snuffed out by fatigue. In the long run, what he represents is a life, a sense of values, is the importance of thought, imagination, craft, and finally the holiness of the spirit of man. Let him be used fully and fully honored and trusted, even in his own land.

Roberta Grahame

Roberta Grahame, on the basis of her own experiences with classes in verse composition at Wellesley, similarly stressed the two-way benefits of the writer as teacher of English: "The so-called 'creative writer' gets as much from a class as he gives to it; and it is from the point of view of the teacher as receiver of suggestions and, possibly, inspiration that I shall speak.

"First, the class in verse composition represents the coming audience. (The same is true of other classes, but perhaps with a slight difference.) The students I taught, or many of them, seemed ready for the poetic standards of their own day — and this in spite of the fact that they did not know a great deal of modern poetry. Anything in the least old-fashioned within the comparatively recent field bored them.

"Second, the class shows the teacher the nature of the competition which, as poet, he is to face. I was surprised at the number of students who achieved fresh and even striking diction. They were able to produce metaphorical metaphors! The fact caused me to ask whether some degree of poetic talent is not much more widespread than is generally recognized.

"Why, then, do we not produce a great many more poets? For several reasons: Often they lack any *prolific* imagination. Excellence is rarely sustained throughout a poem—and practice might not cure this. Publication is difficult. Perhaps it is true that the poetic gift usually dies early. But persistence and accident count for a good deal in determining the emergence of a few persons, ultimately, as poets.

"The experience makes one examine the poetry of one's time, and one's own poetry, with a new critical eye. One becomes increasingly aware of the uncertainty of our contemporary poetic judgments. Does the admiration accorded to incongruous metaphor and obscure symbolism cause us to accept as genuine poetry what perhaps requires no great gift to produce?

"In any event, the teaching of verse composition adds to one's self-criticism, and raises interesting questions of general critical evaluation."

While recognizing with the two preceding speakers, the benefits that might accrue to the writer as college teacher of English, Gerald Brace, of Boston University, as the fourth member of the panel, examined the difficulties of writers on college faculties.

Gerald Brace

For the college and the student, such a teacher is desirable. For the writer himself, the union is less desirable. Twenty-five years ago, a poet or novelist in academic life felt unappreciated, yet he expected time to better his position. The hope has not been realized yet, nor does it seem likely that it ever will. Between scholar and writer there is inevitable opposition. The writer finds academic advancement slow or nonexistent unless he devotes himself to scholarly writing. He is viewed with skepticism as one too little conscious of committees, one who is somehow temporary, a wanderer. Nevertheless, if the union is arduous, it is "worth maintaining; it is good for the college and the student, and sometimes for the writer."

Poets cannot make a living by writing poetry. In colleges and universities, Mr. Brace went on, a writer finds an atmosphere more sympathetic than the world outside. He becomes a part of academic surroundings, perhaps meeting the requirement of a Ph.D., perhaps suffering a dissipation of early talent. Yet his contribution to students is of positive significance. His training, in contrast to the training of a scholar, enables him to help divert the approach to literature from the "austerity of the scientific intellect." He acts as a safeguard against overintellectualizing. The danger most formidable is that he, also, will turn his attentions to "higher criticism", and sacrificing himself to the *Kenyon Review* lose genuine immediacy of relationship with his art, suffer a drying up of his creative energy.

John Ciardi

Finding in the audience John Ciardi, of the Harvard faculty, Chairman Holmes invited him to give his ideas on the topic of discussion. Professor Ciardi's response was as follows:

I feel, in exactly what degree I'm hard put to it to say, that the traditional methods of teaching poetry in the college are not adequate. I think I see more than enough evidence of this inadequacy in the simple fact that most English majors have only the fuzziest notion of what makes a poem. I was astonished, on first reaching graduate school, to discover how many advanced students with a hawk's eye for a neo-platonist doctrine in a poem, still had no notion of the poem.

I think the creative writer should function on the faculty in opposition to the historian of sources and ideas. There is something to be said on both sides; but why shouldn't the argument be established as part of the cur-

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riculum? In art school you have a man who paints teaching the students. In conservatories of music you have musicians. In the schools of literature you have maiden aunts, clergymen, historians, and philologists.

My special protest is against the standard Sophomore Survey Course laughably called **Introduction to Literature**, in which the student finds himself taking a course in the history of poetry without ever finding out any significant part of what poetry is.

I want to see more emphasis on the process of the poem. More attempt to develop the metaphorical sense through which the poem speaks, and without which no reader can grasp it. More intelligent concentration on the thematic, rather than logical, development of at least all lyric poetry, but of most other poems as well. I'd like to see less "What does this say?" and "Under what influences?" and more "Why does it say what it says in this particular way?" I'd like to see students trained to a realization that words used in poetry are not the same as words used in conversation, that words have non-literal meanings, and that often these non-literal meanings (connotations) are the real elan of the poem. I'd like to see students with a sense of what makes an English line.

And I do not see these things, whereby I accuse the English teachers of not having taught them. In fact it was not until very recently that I seriously discovered that most of them have not taught these things **because they do not know them**. Because they have no interest in poetry. They are interested in history. In grinding out scholarly papers to ensure a job. In achieving semi-rapture over the "sentiments" of poetry and assuming that the "sentiment" is the poem.

These are my charges. Practicing poets can be guilty of them, but I think they are less likely to be. There's a professional view of poetry as well as an amateur one. I think the professional view must have its hearing. The alternative is no audience and therefore no poetry.

Concluding, Professor Holmes considered the adjustment which the writer-teacher must constantly be making, a difficult balance which requires common sense, and awareness always of what is happening about him.

Cornelius Dorgan, Reporter
Mt. Holyoke College

The New Battle of the Books

(Report of the program on the World Classics, the Great Books, and the college curriculum, Alan McGee, Mt. Holyoke, Chairman.)

John H. Finley, Jr., Harvard

John H. Finley, Jr., Charles Eliot Professor of Greek at Harvard, confirmed the conviction of other speakers that the study of the world classics has a real value for the American undergraduate. He found this value to reside, chiefly, in the effectiveness with which the ancients, notably the Greeks—uninhibited by restraining constructs of petrified convention and dogma—combined a fresh and vital articulation of the sensuous, concrete immediacies of experience with an eagerness and competence in equally fresh, direct, and dynamic generalization,—in their quest for cultural norms to guide the development of the individual and society. The result was, according to Professor Finley, that, for the ancients, the arts, generally speaking, and literary art in particular were vehicles of very central knowledge: "This knowledge is of the only reality which we can be said to know directly—namely, that presented by the consciousness—a reality compounded of reason, moral feeling, emotion, and sense impression." In stimulating within our students this immediate, simultaneous, and inclusive awareness of reality as a vital continuum of the several modes of experience—ranging from the concrete perception to the generalized norm, the classics of antiquity, in Professor Finley's opinion, can make a major contribution to the general education of the American undergraduate.

**Alvan S. Ryan,
Univ. of Massachusetts,
Ft. Devens**

I remember the dismay and frustration of a colleague at Iowa University once after he had given an examination in sophomore English class—a course that included selected world classics, among them two plays by Sophocles. He had hurriedly written on the board for discussion and evaluation the following statement: "Sophocles said Matthew Arnold saw life steadily and saw it whole." The dismaying answer came from one student who devised a somewhat loosely documented but elaborate judgment of Sophocles' comment upon the wholeness and steadiness of Arnold's vision. Such responses to the world classics, though infrequent, give us pause. But they can be matched by famous definitions I have received in the

Sophomore survey of English Literature:

"Bedivere — was a Jute in Beowulf by Gaffery Causar."

"Gloriana — represents Queen Anne whom Herbert Spencer extols in the Faerie Queene."

Admitting, then, that no course is foolproof, I am going to recommend the inclusion of world classics in freshman and sophomore English.

We are all familiar with the common Freshman English course in which the instructor teaches correct and effective writing through the use of a handbook of composition and a book of essays, sketches, or stories. Improvement comes through constant practice in writing — weekly themes if the instructor can manage to correct them without becoming a gibbering idiot before June — and the interplay between the writing and the study of models.

The argument for such a course runs somewhat as follows: The student has plenty to write about — his own experience, his family, his home town, his social, political, and religious convictions, his observations of the world around him. The role of the teacher is to make him aware of this large fund of thought and observation, and to help him to shape it into essays and sketches of his own.

Now for its deficiencies. First is the fact that the analysis of expression easily degenerates into preciosity when divorced from consideration of the thought, if indeed it is possible at all. The natural curiosity of the student leads to consideration of **what** the author says as well as to **how** he says it. We plunge, then, into the ideas of some modern essay, and soon we have the class discussing their validity. The author makes assumptions. What are they, and are they justified? He generalizes upon the past. Can we accept his generalization? If the teacher values the dialectical method of teaching, he often feels that no matter how gymnastic a 50-minutes he has had with his class, more holes were dug than were filled up. If, on the other hand, the instructor insists on conclusions, he often must assume the role of Professor of Things-in-General, or as someone has put it, he must "play God" to his students. The alternative is the ceaseless and often indecisive comparison of opinions, for the simple reason that most serious essays take for granted a knowledge the student does not have.

This conventional freshman course has another weakness that becomes most glaringly apparent when the student moves on to the sophomore survey of English literature. We find that,

however much his writing ability has improved in the first year, he is almost totally incapable of reading imaginative literature, especially lyric poetry, with either pleasure or profit. Hence the reasonableness and necessity of such anthologies as **An Approach to Literature** by Brooks, Purser, and Warren, and the whole movement we call "the return to the text".

My objection to these approaches is chiefly that they are too fragmentary and too narrowly limited in scope. They have neither continuity nor cumulative impact. They lack significant content of the kind needed for an understanding of contemporary life. The reading in the first and second year English courses should be richer and more challenging. One of its chief aims should be to give the student the dramatic and imaginative experience of other times, other cultures than his own — or at least an introduction to a few of those classic readings of human experience that have influenced and shaped our thinking for generations. I say few, because I have in mind not a survey of world literature, but the reading of whole books wherever possible.

The decision to organize the required English course around a few world classic raises these questions: Which classics? How many? In what order? Chronological, according to genres, or by some logical pattern, such as the method of contrasting ancient and modern books in a kind of historic dialectic? I suggest as workable answers those we arrived at through our experience with a two-year course at the University of Iowa. . . .

For the present plan of the Iowa course I refer you to an excellent article by Professor John McGalliard in the April 1948 number of the **Journal of General Education**.

Such a course as this provides some common knowledge among university students of those classical, Hebraic, and Christian writings that have helped to shape our own society and culture. Moreover, some of the chief English and American writers, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Emerson, Thoreau, Mark Twain are studied in a context that is lacking under either of the plans I discussed at the outset.

The two arguments against this type of course are: first, that such a course, even if it excludes translations, leaves no time for instruction in writing. Composition becomes an orphan. And second, that if translations are admitted, they are useless as models. I believe both objections can be answered satisfactorily in theory and practice.

One solution to the first diffi-

culty is to limit the time devoted to the texts the first semester, and with the aid of a good handbook to concentrate on writing problems. This solution worked out well at Iowa, where we began with relatively simple readings which left most of the time in English I for composition. Another answer is to have the poorest students doing remedial work in elementary skills, while one hour a week is set aside for the reading and criticism of papers and close attention to writing problems. If the course extends over two years, replacing the survey course in English literature, the continuous practice in writing more than offsets the fact that it does not receive full attention during the freshman year.

Even though it is best to read the classics in the original, what they have to convey in beauty and wisdom is too important for us to omit them entirely. The structure and design of the *Odyssey*, for example, can be grasped even in translation, and even though it may be useless as a "model" for the freshman writer, its significance as an "imitation of human action" is not lost in English. Furthermore, the gain in the student's comprehension and enjoyment of English and American literature from such reading is undeniable. I am sure that as long as the course includes an ample selection of English and American works, whatever sacrifice of style to sense may be found in the translations will never seriously damage the writing of the beginning student.

There is time only to mention the way in which the reading in the world classics may be related to writing. I suggest that the reading and discussion of such works as the *Odyssey*, the *Bible*, Plato's dialogues, the *Canterbury Tales*, *Hamlet*, *Walden*, in terms of theme, structure, narrative and dramatic method, character portrayal, the values and attitudes reflected in them, challenges the student to formulate and to express his own ideas and to come to terms with himself. By making the student aware of both differences and similarities between earlier and modern cultures, the books perform the catalytic function of the conventional volume of essays, and they add much more significance to his knowledge.

Alan McGee, Mt. Holyoke

Although teachers of English must all agree that students should have a knowledge of the great books, it is doubtful that work in English should be sacrificed in order to teach it. The most important single fact about the English teacher's task is that he is teaching **English**, and through English the nature of

language, whether the documents studied are severely logical or aesthetic in function. In composition we try to stimulate, extend, and deepen the student's capacity to phrase ideas effectively, with the aim of sensitizing his mind and enlarging its grasp of clearly organized ideas as well as its awareness of complex emotions.

Anyone who has had enough linguistic training to be able to compare originals with translations knows perfectly well that translations cannot possibly convey the organic unity of an original, whether it be a work of art or even an intellectual treatise. Yet it is in this organic unity that our fundamental task lies. The task of the English teacher is to sensitize the young to words and to word order, to show the interdependence of idea and syntax, to harmonize the language and the organization of idea. This cannot be done with translations, which interpose an aesthetic between word and idea. It is perfectly proper that our students should know the *Iliad*. It is quite improper that the English teacher should renounce Pope or Swift or Eliot or Austen in order to teach the 'Wardour Street English' of Lang, Leaf, and Myers, with its Pre-Raphaelite knights in medieval byrnies masquerading as Homeric heroes. It is perfectly proper to require the reading of great books in other languages if we can still teach English. It is grossly improper to give up English.

If a student can be brought to appreciate the restraint and depth of Jane Austen, he has learned more than fifty translations could give him. If he can respond deeply to

"April is the cruellest month,
breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land,
mingling
Memory and desire." . . .

he has been brought to an important stage in his education which he will never get from Jowett or Butcher and Lang or William Archer. Even if the translation becomes a work of art in its own right, it will not do, for in that case the problem of meaning becomes too complex for treatment in any but advanced work.

The argument is advanced that the great books serve as vehicles for analysis, but the argument is specious. One is then not analyzing art but an abstraction from it. The character of Elizabeth Bennet or of Falstaff comes from the words they say, not from some reified "personality." This is analysis with the substance removed. It is building the house from the roof down, without ever getting to the foundations.

The further argument is made that English is parochial, that the student needs a wider continent. But the assumptions underlying the argument are false. There is nothing so parochial as the individual himself. The English teacher's task is to get the individual out of his parish into the diocese of his own culture by a knowledge of its chief vehicle, the language. To this he can bring the abstractions and the ideas of the other languages. But if he is not alive in his own parish and his own diocese, he is alive nowhere. He is homeless and inert.

It is argued that composition need not be neglected in a two-year course in the literature of the great books. It is attended to by spending proportionately more time on grammar, punctuation, and the paragraph at the beginning of the course. But grammar and punctuation are only the superficial aspects of composition; the paragraph is merely symptomatic of the underlying integrity of ideas and words in the composition. These subjects glaze over the fundamental nature of composition: the discipline of interrelating words and ideas as they develop in any piece of writing. To use translations as "models" is to induce a new artificiality far worse than any excesses of eighteenth-century rhetoric. We want to keep our students writing with the real language of men. To use translations and ideas may give moral force to a section of Freshman English, but it cannot be called a course in composition.

That many of our anthologies are hopelessly bad and that much composition work seems concerned with irrelevant "elegancies" is no reason to give up English altogether. We had better improve Freshman English instead, and it can be done in our own language.

On the surface, it would seem less fallacious to substitute the great books for English literature, but actually the fallacy is as deep-seated. The literary historian can lecture about trends, developments, and schools as though they were actualities rather than constructs. He can also talk of character, plot, and idea as if they constituted the work of art. He can talk about life. That way morality lies. We are interested in art.

Our students arrive in college with *ideas fixes* about Nature, Artificiality, Character, and Emotion, but with an innocent disregard of metaphor or word or phrase. It is our business to show that art cannot exist except in its own medium, and that the nature of the medium determines what may be said in it, just as surely as the nature of the con-

sciousness determines what we may know. Only by demonstrating the medium in full operation can we give our students any real understanding of art. Only through this demonstration can they relate their understanding of art to understanding life.

This is not to say that books should not be read in translation. They must be so read if we are to have any catholicity of taste. But books in translation cannot be substituted for work in English. If we have done all we can for the student in his own language, let him go on to apply our generalities about art to the larger elements in the form of a translation, knowing what sort of thing he is missing. But let us not mislead him into thinking that we are really teaching him literature when we offer him translations. We are teaching him something about literature but not literature itself.

If the great books are necessary, and one wants to believe that they are, they should be taught in addition to the student's work in his own literature. Shouldn't the teachers of the other languages do it? They know what the originals say. Indeed, they have studied them. They can add scholarship to good teaching, if "add" is the right word. In general, we cannot. Perhaps we should stick to our own last, rather than misuse someone else's.

G. Harris Daggett, New Hampshire

G. Harris Daggett reported that at the University of New Hampshire there was no "Great Books" course, but a course in the Humanities. (A full report on this course will appear in an early CRITIC.) In summarizing experience with the course, Professor Daggett said, "Our experience in teaching is to include in the syllabus fewer and fewer selections and more and more whole books, which means that we pay the price of covering far less ground."

Great Books: But When? F. Cudworth Flint, Dartmouth

My title will become clear if it is expanded: "Great Books: But When Is a Book Recognized as Great By Its Reader?" That is to say, when does the element of greatness in the book transmute itself into an element of greatness in the reader's consciousness?

Last year I taught the second semester of a course at Dartmouth College in the reading of great books.

When I first confronted one of the five sections which the teaching hours available for the course enabled us to set up, I had expected to find

from fourteen to sixteen men, who might possibly be grouped around a table in one of our smaller classrooms. We could then proceed through the term by means of a series of well-smoked discussions. I am no smoker myself, but it seems to be a law of masculine psychology that the denser at the atmosphere, the clearer the mind. Instead of what I expected, I confronted twenty-six students ranged in mute rows. I glanced rapidly along the files. Probably no English majors here—I could see no signs of the spectacled, pale, rumpled appearance that betokens an undergraduate really interested in the arts. The costumes were negligent, yes; but this negligence was the approved semi-athletic, semi-lounging-about-the-campus negligence which is painstakingly maintained by the "typical" Dartmouth undergraduate.

Why were these men here? The majority, perhaps, were hardy survivors of the first semester's work in Humanities II. Others were newcomers—for either half of the course may be elected independently; newcomers lured by a certain indefiniteness in the catalogue statement that "It is the aim of the course to examine the principal phases of growth and alteration of the Western cultural tradition from Homer to the eighteenth century. This will be done through the study and discussion of a number of great books, representative of different stages of European life and thought, such as, in the first semester. . . . Second semester readings will be announced later." To these men, the course represented anything from a pipe course—"Pipe-dreams of the Ages" would be a good title—to a magic skeleton key that would open all doors in life, particularly the doors one had not yet approached. There they all were, polite, attentive, and at sea.

And we began with the *Confessions* of St. Augustine—the complete volume in the recent Sheed translation. Well, how does one do that? How would you do it? Oh, "Easy!" you say. *Confessions*—the private life of a saint, yes, but of a man who was all too human, who was a great sinner as well. I came to Carthage, where a cauldron of illicit loves leapt and boiled about me.

All the boys would be interested in that. As, indeed, they were. For to most of these young men, the conflict between the impulse of sex and the behavior prescribed by society, by conscience, even, for the exceptional student, by clearly apprehended religious doctrine, is real and important.

But what teacher could acquiesce in a presentation of St. Au-

gustine's *Confessions* that came to no more than this?—that made of them just another case study for Dr. Freud's notebook? If that is all the saint had to say, his book might as well be summarized in fifty lines of fine print, like the other "cases." What, then, of the first chapter of the first book, beginning "Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised"? Or the second chapter, beginning "But how can I call unto my God"? Or the third, beginning "But if You fill heaven and earth, do they contain You?" Or the fifth, beginning "Who shall grant me to rest in Thee?" The *Confessions* may seem to the student not a great book at all, but merely a scattering of autobiographical tidbits enmeshed in boring passages of irrelevant piety, unless the student not only is told, but actually comes to appreciate the fact that the *Confessions* records with utter honesty the struggle of a man to live the life of eternity while yet the prisoner of time.

And how is the average male undergraduate, *le jeune homme moyen materialiste*, to be inducted into any such apprehension? The teacher may begin by stating that eternity is the recourse of those who have been frustrated by time, and for commonplace illustration may point out the resurgence of interest in religion which has been reported in many quarters as a consequence of the anxieties and grief occasioned by the recent World War. Yet this illustration may not make the point; some students were too young to be directly caught up into the war's distresses; and others, the veterans, were at the resilient age when action and excitement assuage catastrophe, and horror can often be shed like an old suit of clothes. Besides, Augustine didn't live during World War II. Wasn't he a citizen of a civilized empire in which Christianity had triumphed? Why should he worry?

So perhaps the teacher decides, as I decided, that some part of the class hours must be given to a sketch of St. Augustine's world. I doubt, indeed, that the average member of the class could have bettered the succinct essay on the fall of the Roman Empire which *The New Yorker* recently reported as the product of a boy of about ten: "The fall of the Roman Empire was caused by neglect." Period: end of essay. All well enough in its way, but not calculated to induce in a class a vivid apprehension of a world crisis. So I mention the over-expansion of the Empire and the inadequacy of the means of transportation. Some member of the class asks what, precisely, the limits of the Empire were,

and how fast a proconsul could travel by each of the available means of transport. I mention the growth of large estates at the expense of the small farmer, who was reduced to a semi-servile condition, and am asked why this process occurred. I mention the ruin of the well-to-do provincial urban class through its obligation to make up any deficits in the provincial tax quota, and am asked why there should be any deficits. I mention the laws which bound a man to his father's trade and social status, and which bound a cultivator to his district, and am asked to explain in detail how matters ever got into so parlous a state as to suggest such regulations. I mention the disunity and insubordination of the army, and more especially of the Praetorian Guard, and am asked what had become of the patriotic citizen army of the great days of the Roman Republic. I mention the alarm created in Augustine's own district by the approach of the Vandals, and am asked why they didn't stay by the shores of the Black sea. I say they were pushed by the Huns, and am asked why these didn't stay in Asia. I mention what Professor Ellsworth Huntington—or is it somebody else by the same name?—thinks may have been changes in the climate or rate of soil erosion in Central Asia. I mention . . . and am asked . . . until finally I gain no surcease in my nightly slumbers, for in my dreams the Vandals and Goths whirl in a sanguinary merry-go-round about the Mediterranean shores, while Rome falls and Carthage burns.

Exaggeration? Yes—some; yet the picture is not too far-fetched, and the problem is a real one. The corner-stone of this course is the proposition that the reading of great books is a valuable humanistic experience, and one which has been too much crowded to one side in modern education. Yet here I was, turning the class hours into lectures on political, social, economic, and commercial history, with an excursus on the life and doctrines of the founder of Manicheism, in an attempt to reconstruct the body and pressure of the time in which Augustine lived. The attempt was not without value; it was even to some degree necessary. But to what degree? And meanwhile, what had become of the great book?

I subscribe to the doctrine of our Chicago Scholastics, that a great book is above and beyond both our time and its own—though I think this doctrine is only part of the truth. Also, I subscribe to the assertion of our "progressive" educators that in teaching, one must begin with the student where he is, in his

own time—though again, I think this doctrine but a part of the truth. Let us say that these two doctrines make up two-thirds of the truth. The missing third is supplied by the historian's proposition, most unwelcome to the Scholastic, and ominous of much labor for the student, that every book that is not a sham comes to us speaking some version of the language and thought of its own time. The locus of the book must be sought by a kind of triangulation, between the world of the author, the world of the student, and that world which seems to us permanent. Yet in carrying out any such complex pedagogical operation, what we are triangulating for stands a good chance of getting neglected altogether. While we are arranging that the book may be understood, we may leave it no time to speak.

Do I then recant, and renounce the whole idea of a course in the reading of great books? No; any great book is an excellent acquaintance when its greatness has become manifest. I have no sweeping conclusion of any kind to offer—save that the teaching of any sort of course in great books is for the teacher an education—and an education gained the hard way. My more particular deductions are still so tentative as hardly to rank as conclusions. Of these, one is that in our Dartmouth Humanities 11-12 we are trying to do too much in too little time.

For a course in great books that aims to mirror successive phases of our western culture, four semesters are probably none too much; or at least three, under which arrangement a fourth semester could be devoted to exploration of music or the fine arts, as the student chose. For a one or two semester course, some integrating principle other than a historical one is probably desirable, as in some of the humanistic courses in general education at present being tried out at Harvard. A shift away from history would probably reduce the number of books that would clamor for inclusion in the course—a reduction all to the good; for I do not see how more than five really great books of the length of the average novel (or the equivalent made up of shorter pieces) can be even chewed, much less digested, in a single semester.

But whatever others may do, one change I shall work toward, so far as I am able. When I taught Humanities 12, the course might well have been named, from the point of view of my students, "Great Books, Every Now and Then." I hope in future to do better—to teach a course that my students could conscientiously name "Great Books—Yes, Indeed, Most of the Time."

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Teaching The Novel

(Carl J. Weber, Colby, Chairman)

Symbols Ahoy

Alexander Cowie, Wesleyan

My text, the occasion considered, is a natural one. It occurs in *Moby-Dick*, the thirty-second chapter, third to the last verse: "God keep me from ever completing anything." This goes not only for my tiny part in the present proceedings (in which I am at most one harpooner out of three) but also for my conception of Melville's use of symbols.

In this paper I am warning myself against the temptation to make too much of the analysis of symbols in the teaching of *Moby-Dick* — for I take quite literally my assignment as being to discuss the teaching of *Moby-Dick* to undergraduates. Against the study of symbols in general I am not so silly as to protest. As for *Moby-Dick*, it is certainly useful momentarily to think of Ahab's quest as a symbol of man's implacable enmity against the "eternal malignance" of the universe. Perhaps, too, the entire transaction involving the Pequod may at times be taken as a symbol of the interdependency of good and evil. I must say at the outset also that I regard *Moby-Dick* as a richer treasure trove of symbols than any other nineteenth-century American novel. What I do warn myself against is this: that the business of symbol-reading for its own sake may become a species of critical racket. What source-hunting was to an earlier generation of scholars, symbol-mongering threatens to become for ours. The temptation is to take the symbol as the be-all and end-all of criticism. We tend dogmatically to try to explain too much by the symbol. The temptation is to feel that if we have attached a meaning to what is apparently a symbol — if we have in effect solved a riddle — we have done our part. But this is not the whole duty of the teacher; indeed it may be a misconstruction of the teacher's job. *Moby-Dick* is not a cryptogram anyway.

What I here suggest dimly is too big a subject for the present paper, too big for me to handle. Suffice it to say on this occasion that I am thinking of two aspects of the subject: (1) that in the teaching of *Moby-Dick* it is best to begin not with symbol-reading but with the stuff that gave rise to the symbols and (2) that rich as symbols are as tokens of Melville's being — his feelings and perceptions — they are by their very nature unavailable for use as keys to a coherent system of thought.

First, in teaching undergraduates it is best to begin with the material that gave birth to the

symbols. No one has a right to a symbol who is not master of the area which gave birth to and nourished it. Much hazy mysticism in modern literature is referable to the failure of its authors to start with their feet on terra firma: a symbol is a substitution, or a representative, not a self-contained way of life. It is best to begin with the clean, sound, sun-lit timber of untransformed fact; the essential Melville is not perpetually shrouded in the mists of symbolism — he is quite as real and quite as at home among bolts and hammers and forges and logs and nautical shrouds. The masthead must exist as a thing honest and visible and touchable in its own right before it can become a platform from which to dive into Platonic speculation. Melville the writer worked from steel-hard materials; and if sparks of abstractions rose from his text, their arcs can best be measured by one who is close to the worker's operations. This means beginning with facts — in *Moby-Dick* the facts of sailing and whaling. To use his own phrase, Melville "concocted information into wisdom," and of course the mode of that wisdom was often a symbol. Another pertinent text from Melville is this one (from *Pierre*): "The visible world of experience (is) that procreative thing which impregnates the muses." In order, then, to follow the course of Melville's art (more important than his thought), I counsel myself to examine the un-symbolic, the untransformed material. I counsel the student not to look at first for symbols — still less a "hideous allegory" — but to try to enjoy the hemp and oak of the book almost for their own sake. Parenthetically, a good specific against premature symbol-mongering is to take a trip to a whaling museum — to see, as I did lately, such a ship as the Charles Morgan, a very stout whaling-ship built of very solid materials in 1841 and productive to her owners, before she was finished, of the tidy sum of two million dollars, — exclusive of symbols. It is possible to look at a hammer as a hammer, a windlass as a windlass, a tobacco pipe as a carbon-caked instrument of pleasure, topgallant cross-trees as an uncomfortable post of observation, a trypot as a big kettle. It is useful, too. It is possible to think of Stubb really eating a whale-steak with his taste-buds extremely active as he smacked his "epicurean lips." It is useful and it is fun to read the un-cryptic passage on old whales whose love-life is in the past: "Our Ottoman enters upon the impotent, repentant, admonitory stage of life, forswears, disbands his harem, and grown to an ex-

emplary, sulky old soul, goes about all alone among the meridians and parallels saying his prayers, and warning each young Leviathan from his amorous errors." Not a symbol in sight — only a simple comparison. For Melville, unlike many of the feeble race of symbolists, had a fund of humor. It is even possible to think of Ahab as a shrewd, practical captain whose "prudential policy" dictated that he give in to Starbuck and allow the leaking casks to be hoisted: if we do, we shall be the better fitted to appreciate the "sultanism" of his mind on other occasions. Queequeg is useful to Melville in many categories before his final "dive"; but I like to remind myself to emphasize his fight with and rescue of the greenhorn who was swept overboard off the little Moss — as good a tale of action as students will find in any movie. The competition between Starbuck's boats and the Virgin's boats is a nice bit of straight narrative, leaving out of account, for the moment, its use as a unit in the symbolic sequence of the book. I think that Melville deeply enjoyed the factual aspects of his work.

Then I should move on to the simpler sorts of symbolism such as Ahab's tossing his pipe into the sea. I should note things like the lesson of the blanket-pieces, first observing the fact that the blanket helps to keep a warm-blooded creature warm and afterwards noting Melville's transition into a characteristic admonition: "Do thou too live in this world without being of it." I should refer to the monkey-rope, symbol of every person's "siamese connexion with a plurality of other mortals." Finally I should move, move with caution and humility, into the realm of the more difficult symbolism, especially that of the fire and of the sea.

The sea and the fire provide symbols that are difficult for various reasons. Melville's symbols are not so much fixed representations of a philosophical scheme (recall his recorded despair of ever constructing a system out of "foreign unsystematisable elements") as fragmentary notations of his momentary attitude or outlook or emotion. They are fractions whose total is never known. Melville's petition to be safe-guarded against completeness was appropriate: there is often death in critical finalities. Moreover the symbols of *Moby-Dick* are sometimes on a literal level contradictory. Ahab is perhaps a multiple symbol. Schneider in his *American Philosophy* has pointed out that Ahab's tragedy is a fusion of the tragedies of Prometheus, Job, and Jonah. He might have added, of Faust.

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Ahab is a man (if a man) so enigmatic that Starbuck does not know whether to strike him or pray to him; he is apparently the master of the Parsee and yet at times he is seen kneeling at the Parsee's feet; he is a man of indomitable will bent on engineering his own destiny (conceivably with the aid of infernal powers), but he is also aware that possibly he has no real influence over the events he is enacting: they may have been decreed immutably aeons ago; he worships the clear spirit of fire (whose son and whose victim he is) but he worships "defyingly." So with the sea, symbol of that from which "thou canst never return" the direst of all perils, but symbol also of a good: "Know ye now, Bulkington . . . that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore." Throughout *Moby-Dick* there are oppositions of this sort. Symbols considered as elements in a coherent system of thought fail to coalesce to form a unity.

I do not mean, in these perhaps somewhat rash remarks, to invalidate any single interpretation of a symbol, but I am suggesting that attempts to round them up and correlate them with a view to getting at the secret or final meaning of the book are likely to be defeated in the nature of the case. Even in his excellent article on the fire-symbolism of *Moby-Dick* one of our critics finds that there are elements that refuse to be obedient to an all-inclusive and consistent plan. And how many things does the whale itself symbolize? To try to reduce a succession of symbols into one master symbol would be to impoverish our experience in reading *Moby-Dick* — whose poetical power derives so much from its brilliant diversity — just as to give the average temperature, precipitation, and humidity of a year's weather in a certain region would be a fantastically inadequate way of suggesting the memorable succession of experiences that have gone into the making of that year's average. Melville should be taken day by day.

Like Shakespeare, Melville dealt in what he called "short, quick probings at the very axis of reality," but he also preferred to work with "careful disorderliness," and he did not count upon completing his task. Nor did he think important books had answers: "While the countless tribes of common novels laboriously spin veils of mystery, only complacently to clear them up at last . . . yet the profounder emanations of the human mind, intended to il-

lustrate all that can be known of human life, these never unravel their intricacies." It is for this reason that the philosopher Schneider was "baffled" in his attempt to interpret Melville satisfactorily. Melville's symbols bring us close to what we feel are centres of his thought but do not render up the final secret. The symbols flash briefly, serve their purpose, and are gone or replaced. They are quicksilver. To try to assemble them as if they were parts of a puzzle is idle.

The basic reason for avoiding the attempt to do so lies in the essence of a symbol itself. By its very nature a symbol is transient and fugitive. It is a rocket, not a steady flame. Its life-span is likely to be short. This was suggested by F. O. Matthiessen, who said that symbols cannot be understood or conveyed "except in their own words." "The balance of the symbol," he adds, "is precarious." With allegory, the case is otherwise. The symbol differs from the allegory, as Robert Penn Warren has pointed out, in being dynamic. The allegory lends itself to protracted service, may underlie and illustrate a system of thought. The symbol, says Warren, is not to be used in the same fashion: "its component parts, not to be equated with anything else, function in their own right." For these reasons, among others, it seems to me that in the study of *Moby-Dick* students must encounter the symbol, endeavor to grasp some of its implication — and drop it. The art of reading symbols, as of raising children, is to know when to let them go. This encounter with a succession of symbols in *Moby-Dick* is a glorious and fearful aspect of the reading of the book, but it calls for a relaxation of our philosophical demands and the opening of our imaginations.

In closing I should like to advert to one more symbol. You may recall that the surgeon Bunker of the Samuel Enderby thinks that Ahab has a fever. Certainly Ahab's pulse and respiration have been disturbed. A certain famous professor, now dead, once said that the business of a teacher is to raise a thirst. (How many dry lectures this advice accounts for I do not know.) I shall be bold enough to try to change the figure: I think that the business of a teacher is to run a fever: maybe he can spread it! Much of our best teaching, I fancy, is done by being rather than by saying. If we can be infected by the perilously rich symbolism of Melville, perhaps we will be a focus for the infection of the class. Benedetto Croce once said that he was astonished at the ability of professors to handle

"infectious" materials without catching the contagion:

Is this enjoyment of poetry (asks Croce), this delight in beauty, rare or common? It is both: as a settled habit it is rare, reserved for select spirits who are born to it and trained by education; it is common, as the native tendency of ingenuous minds. The place where it is hardest to find is precisely among the professional students of poetry and of its historical achievements. They seem gifted with a strange immunity, which lets them all their life handle the books of poets, edit and annotate them, discuss their various interpretations, investigate their sources, furnish them with biographical introductions, and all without suffering so much contagion as to experience in their own persons the poetic fever. . . .

I am aware how this implied admonition to myself may be subject to burlesque as being an invitation to sentimentality. I risk that — as I have risked saying things that may be too obvious or naive, things that my audience has long since thought of for itself. My only excuse is that I have come clean and honest. The symbols are there; let us approach them with an ingenuous proach them like acolytes. Let us rather than an ingenious mind.

Heroic Failure

Harry Levin, Harvard

Mr. Harry Levin, Harvard, spoke of his planning and teaching of the Humanities course at Harvard, and the range of novels and other material covered from Greek epics, to Dante, *Paradise Lost*, *Don Quixote*, *Candide*, *Bleak House*, *Moby Dick* and *War and Peace*. Most of these are treated as representing heroic action in a stable society, but such is the temper of more recent times that heroic failure, or anti-climax, is the more evident principle. Especially true of *Moby Dick*, the heroic failure can be approached in a variety of ways. It is possible to see Ahab as a Shakespearean hero, as has quite recently been done, though too greatly stressed, Mr. Levin avers, or as a chivalric hero, or a Homeric hero. Frequently Melville is bookish in his tones, sometimes mockingly so, and his hero, if a hero at all, is a destructive one. The fascination of the book is perennial, however, for it can be covered at four different levels: as narrative, as an allegory, as various kinds of epic, as a solution to the problem of good and evil — the fourth, most interesting level is an enigma, with no final answer.

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